

Their Scarlet Thread

By KEITH GORDON

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In his heart of hearts the handsome young principal of the high school sometimes characterized the young people under his charge in highly unprofessional language as "little beasts." Teaching was by no means his vocation, but simply a compulsory grace by which he hoped to obtain two coveted years of study at Heidelberg.

He did so now with a viciousness that would have horrified their parents, for as he and Miss Comyng entered one of the smaller recitation rooms to look at a globe they were confronted by their own names scrawled upon the blackboard and bristling with the canceled letters common to both. By counting first the canceled and then the remaining letters to the formula "Friendship, love, indifference, hate," the youthful tormentors had discovered and duly published to the world that Miss Comyng's feeling for him was a compound of friendship and indifference, while his own for her was unadulterated love.

But this was not all. Lest the inscription should by any means escape the attention of its objects, warningly scrawled beneath it was the admonition, "Change the name and not the letter, and you change for worse and not for better."

Cartright glanced at his companion swiftly. He devoutly hoped she was not one of those markish sentimental young women who blushed and quivered at occurrences of this sort, thereby giving him an uncomfortable feeling that possibilities hovered in her mind.

But this time he need have had no fear. Miss Comyng took the matter much more coolly than her predecessor had done under similar circumstances. She faced the scrawl with a moment with puckering brows, then transferred her gaze openly to his face and laughed outright at the dawning look of relief she surprised there, and when she spoke it was with a great demureness.

"I don't feel a bit embarrassed," she remarked. "No one, I'm sure, need feel ashamed of feeling 'friendship and indifference' for a colleague. But candidly—her tone changed and became frank and matter of fact—"isn't it amusing that in all those young heads from which the pigtails are still dangling, as well as the clipped and rumpled ones on the other side of the room, the romantic idea should be dominant? You and I, being neither very old nor very ugly—her lips twitched—"will play the leading roles in a living drama for the next few months. One hundred and twenty pairs of keen eyes will be watching us daily, awaiting some sign of our admiration for each other. It's—its simply appalling!"

"Appalling!" he echoed. "I should say it was—and some of them are still in the stage where they spell future with a 'ch' and busy with an 'i'! But I don't mind if you don't," he added magnanimously.

She was sitting on the arm of one of the chairs in a thoroughly girlish but rather undignified attitude. Cartright noticed with satisfaction that her teaching had not "sunk in" as yet.

"Mind! Not I. Why, it's as good as a play. Now, if you come into my room to speak to me during a recitation, especially if you should happen to smile at me, the air becomes electric with meaning. Minnie telegraphs Jennie a swift 'O! you see that?' and even the hulking, overgrown boys who have been sitting like bums upon logs arouse to something like life."

"I've half a mind to show you something I found on the floor today," she remarked slowly, and from the bag at her side she took a slip of paper and held it out to him. "It's extremely flattering to you, anyway."

He looked at the slip. "I bet she's in love with him!" was written in a wabbling, unformed hand. "I don't see how she can help it, he has such fearful fires in his dark eyes. They're just like Rochester's."

There was a moment's silence, and then the two young instructors broke into a roar of laughter that wiped out the last sense of strangeness between them.

"Now that you know that I know, and I know that you know," was Cartright's somewhat involved explanation. "I don't see any reason why we can't be friends. Nothing that those young cubs do can possibly make us shy. We'll show them that the thread of romance doesn't run through every friendship between a man and a woman."

"As the scarlet thread through every bit of rope used by the British navy," she supplemented saucily, and then the talk reverted to school matters.

But the pupils of the Central High school were not slow to discover that there was a new ease and understanding between the beaming teacher of algebra and physiology and the principal whom every girl in the room secretly raved over.

Once Jennie Bascom met them walking in the park, and notwithstanding the fact that on this occasion they were deep in the discussion of pedagogy she described the meeting to Minnie Brown, her chum, the next morning somewhat after this fashion:

"They didn't even see till I was close to them they were so interested in each other. Her cheeks were all pink—you know how lovely she looks with the color shining through that down on her face—and he was looking at her, and his eyes were shining with a great happiness." Here Jennie dropped dreamily into the words of her latest novel—

"And words of love fell from his lips." "But how do you know? You didn't hear them, did you?" demanded the practical and unimaginative Minnie. "Hear them!" was Jennie's scornful retort. "There are some things you don't have to hear to know them. I'll bet you that he was proposing to her. Just wait—and watch the third finger of her left hand."

But, though they waited and watched with a patience that deserved reward, the tapering fingers of Ruth Comyng's left hand remained unadorned. Had they shown any sign of a misunderstanding all might have been forgiven; but, on the contrary, they were apparently the best of friends, and Minnie Brown formed a mean habit, twitting Jennie like this: "Yes that will happen just about the time that that ring appears on Miss Comyng's left hand!" And poor Jennie was forced to listen in silence, for had she not asserted positively that words of love were falling from his lips? She was conscious of a fearful disappointment with life, and she watched this unaccountable hero and heroine with bitter, resentful eyes.

Meantime, the school year drew toward its close, and Cartright, with a dancing heart, saw his dream of two years at Heidelberg about to materialize into a real experience.

"Think of it," he said to Miss Comyng as they roved upon the little lake in the park one dusky spring evening. "After June 15 I'm free. Then, ho, for the vaterland! No more refractory boys, no more pert, half fledged girls, no more tinkling of bells, no more wasting of life and energy on a life I'm utterly unfit for—no more chalk, no more Latin!"

He paused abruptly, as if some unexpected thought had arrested him, and, trailing his oars, he looked curiously at her. She, too, appeared abstracted, but she aroused herself and smiled, "Well!"

"I've had an awful thought," he resumed soberly. "It never occurred to me until this moment, but don't you see—there'll be no more you, either. And I've got so—so accustomed to you, you know!"

His face showed a puzzled amazement that this should be so, and the girl opposite, seeing it, smiled involuntarily. She, too, was a trifle bewildered at a certain quick constriction of the heart that his talk about going abroad had given her. They had been the very best of friends and companions, but was that any reason why she should feel a quick, overwhelming sense of desolation at the mere mention of his going away?

Cartright rowed on absently, mechanically. Then, as the dusk melted softly into darkness, he made for the shore. The girl opposite him was a mere blurred shadow. The boat poked its nose into the shore, and he jumped out. The action seemed to shake off the benumbing amazement that had fallen upon him, and in its place came a great, glad certainty.

He held out a hand—two hands, in fact—to help Miss Comyng ashore, and as she put hers into them he murmured, "My dear, my dear—it's the scarlet thread after all!"

Napoleon and Beet Sugar.

Although the great Napoleon was not the sort of man whom it was ordinarily safe to laugh at, he was ridiculed and caricatured on account of his faith that sugar could be made profitable from beets. In 1811 the emperor promised the French people that they should have sugar from beets if he excluded from France the commerce of England, including the sugars of the British West Indies. This promise led to the publication of a caricature in which the emperor and his little son, the king of Rome, were represented. The emperor was shown sitting in his boy's nursery, squeezing a beet root into a cup of coffee. The baby prince sat near him hard at work sucking a beet root, while the nurse, standing close by, was represented as exclaiming, "Suck it, dear, suck it; your papa says it is sugar!" This biting sarcasm did not prevent Napoleon from spending several million francs at a time when his empire was under a tremendous strain of expenditures in bounties for sugar made from beets.

Pride of Profession.

Old Barney Maguigan was as well known on his "sweep stretch" as the bluecoats on the beat. As his work became somewhat burdensome with the increase of years the residents of the neighborhood urged the employment of an assistant.

Barney did not look upon the suggestion with favor—it savored too strongly of the time when he should be "laid on the shelf"—but he consented to the trial of a new hand at last, and a stout youth was engaged whose broom made quick work of the leaves and litter.

"Yes, sir," Barney admitted reluctantly a few mornings later when asked by an old friend if he did not find his assistant a good worker—"yes, sir, there's no denying he's got the muscle to swing a broom in the open; but, man alive, when it comes to the fancy touches round a lamp post or a sewer mouth, why, he's no good at all!"

Wellington as a Wit.

Although it cannot be said that the Duke of Wellington shone to any great extent as a humorist, he was quite capable of administering a crushing retort when occasion demanded, as the following story, called from a biography of the Iron Duke, shows: Louis Philippe once introduced the duke to one of the French marshals whom he had defeated in the peninsula. With unparadonable discourtesy the marshal turned his back on his old foe during the presentation. The king apologized with what grace he could. "Forgive him, sire," laughed the Iron Duke. "Why, it was I who taught him to do that in the peninsula!"

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THE MANLY APOLOGY.

Story of One Case Where It Was Due and Was Not Given.

It is a brave man who can apologize. It is one of the highest attributes of a gentleman. I never yet knew anybody who lost money by an apology. I know many men who made some. I know a man in the city of London who spoke harshly to his confidential clerk. He accused him of having mislaid or lost a certain long and important letter. The clerk said very politely he had never seen such a document. The merchant said, "Don't be a fool in talking such nonsense." The clerk gave in his resignation. It was the duty of this clerk to call at his employer's house in the evening after dinner to take to the office next morning such letters as would require attention. There he found the missing letter. The merchant had placed it, with a few others, in his overcoat pocket to read carefully at home in the evening. He said: "I did not know I had done that. You must withdraw your resignation. I will increase your salary." But never a word of manly apology. The incident left its sting behind. The confidence and trust the clerk had in his employer were lost. So, a year later, when this confidential clerk came into a big sum of money he refused the partnership that was offered him; he joined an opposition firm, and the profits of this merchant have fallen in four years from £15,000 a year to £3,000. He lost that, and he has gained premature old age and much mental anxiety. This is a true story.

THE DUKE'S DECISION.

Wellington's Verdict in the Case of a Stolen Kiss.

"The Military Reminiscences of a Retired Colonel" contains the following story relating how the Duke of Wellington overcame a somewhat embarrassing difficulty:

The sentry on duty one day at the gate of Hampton Court palace many years ago was asked the time by a young lady, the daughter of the widow of a distinguished soldier, who occupied apartments in the palace. She happened to be wearing a dainty apron, and, appearing to the soldier to be a neat lady's maid, his reply to her question was, "Half past kissing time," and—a kiss.

The indignant young lady fled to report the impertinence to her mother, who promptly sent a letter of complaint to the colonel of the sentry's regiment. The colonel regretted the occurrence and referred the lady, half in jest and half in earnest, to the commander in chief. To the highest quarter accordingly she went for redress and received the following reply:

Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington, while regretting the occurrence of which Miss Q. complains, begs to say that he has searched the army regulations and the articles of war, and he can nowhere find that kissing is a punishable offense from a military point of view. It is against orders for a sentry to converse when on duty, but in this instance it appears that Miss Q. opened the conversation, and the sentry, although he answered in an unusual manner, committed no actual breach of discipline.

Out of His Element.

"I don't believe I'll be able to find the room alone," frankly admitted the guest as he took his key from the clerk. He was accordingly intrusted to the care of the bell boy and for the tenth time since his arrival escorted to one of only twenty rooms on the fifth floor. "That man," said the clerk, "is perfectly sober, and if he were in Wyoming he could lose me on the plains in daylight, and do it easily, while he would find his own way through Stygian darkness, but he has been in the house for three days and is still unable to find his room alone. It only suggests the perplexity of the cat in a strange garret."—New York Tribune.

Elephant Rock.

Elephant Rock, the last remaining and the most colossal idol of the fast fading western Indians, stands out against the sky a few miles northwest of Mescham, in the Blue mountains. The tourist in making the journey through the mountains by the old stage road can look above him and see the giant elephant, molded in the rugged and crumbling stone as it juts out against the sky line, perfect in every part, and he will wonder as he gazes at the likeness at the perfect lines of the great hulk and its natural attitude as it stands stretching longingly toward the north.—New York Herald.

Wanted Her Money's Worth.

A lady who knew that her servants were reading a certain serial inquired of the cook her opinion of the story. "Well, ma'am," was the reply, "we wanted to know what became of Mr. Treherne." The mistress explained that Mr. Treherne was but a minor character and that something must be left to the imagination of the reader. The cook considered and retorted, "But I don't 'old' with paying a 'halfpenny a day for me story and then 'aving to think for myself."—London Chronicle.

Quite Poetic.

"Tell me, Harry," said May Brightley's admirer to her young brother, "who is this other fellow that's been calling on your sister?"

"I don't know his name," replied Harry. "I just call him 'April showers.'"

"What for?"

"Because he brings May flowers."

(Rejected.)

Bertie—When you proposed to his daughter did you meet old Foote? Reggie—Yas. Bertie—Befwob or aftwob proposing? Reggie—Ah—on leaving the house.—New York Times.

To make knowledge valuable you must have the cheerfulness of wisdom.—Emerson.

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